



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Robert F. McDonnell
Governor

June 22, 2012

Dear Board Members of the University of Virginia,

Thank you for your service to the University of Virginia, one of the most effective and prestigious institutions of higher learning in the world. As volunteers spending untold hours managing a billion dollar enterprise, your public service is much valued.

As you well know, Thomas Jefferson served as Governor of Virginia, President of the United States, and was the author of many of our nation's founding principles and documents. It is well known, however, that he considered the founding of the University of Virginia to be his crowning achievement because of a university's capacity to teach and shape the minds of the nation's future leaders. He wrote, "This institution of my native state, the hobby of my old age, will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind, to explore and to expose every subject susceptible of its contemplation."

Because of the University's historic and unparalleled legacy of nearly 200 years, serving on the University's Board of Visitors is one the most significant positions of responsibility in the Commonwealth. I appreciate your service especially in light of the past 12 days, which have been among the most tumultuous in the University's recent history.

Each of you is unquestionably dedicated to the University and its mission and gives generously and sacrificially of your time and talent. Each of you loves the University and wants to make the right long-term decisions for this University that holds world-wide acclaim. Each of you was appointed by Governor Kaine or me because of your success and wisdom as leaders and managers and your demonstrated devotion to the University and the Commonwealth.

While I have been closely monitoring the situation since returning from a trade mission two days ago, I have had a further chance to listen, learn and be educated on certain details surrounding the resignation of the President. Unfortunately, the execution and communication of some of the decisions over the past 12 days has confused and angered people in the larger University community. It is difficult for the public to fully understand the potential merits of a decision, when a lack of transparency exists, and a rationale for change is not immediately provided.

In recent days many alumni, faculty, donors, staff and other interested parties have urged me to dictate to you how you should govern on specific votes of the Board. I will not do that. I have been clear that the role of any Governor is not to micro-manage personnel decisions of the Board, for doing so undermines the entire university governance structure, and weakens the chain of command and authority of the Board and President. No Governor, nor for that matter, faculty member, donor, politician, or member of the public has access to all the information that you do to make important strategic decisions. You are appointed to be studious managers and make good decisions.

When it comes to *policy* decisions, I am absolutely committed to advancing several specific goals and initiatives with you, and remain dedicated to the reform effort to keep our colleges and universities competitive and excellent. As you know, I have worked hard to enact numerous policy initiatives in the Top Jobs legislation and the budget that do just that, such as keeping tuition increases low in order to limit crushing student debt, increasing spots for Virginia students in Virginia schools, increasing the number of degrees awarded, providing more student financial aid and faculty compensation, and ensuring an adequate focus on STEM-H subjects to remain competitive in our quickly-changing global economy. I have championed an increase of \$350 million of new funding for our colleges and universities to reverse a decade of disinvestment. We must continue to have your leadership to boldly advance the acquisition of knowledge in a cost-effective manner.

However, the request that any Governor should prescribe specific personnel actions to institutions of higher learning – the same institutions of higher learning that routinely seek more independence from state government - would undermine the long-standing relationship between Richmond and the universities that has served the Commonwealth and its institutions of higher learning well.

I learned last evening that you are now convening a third Board meeting to discuss the issues surrounding the office of the President. While how you vote is up to you, I ask you to adhere to the following principles and protocols:

First, eliminate any uncertainty on the future of President Sullivan immediately. The university community needs closure now to move forward. Tuesday must be your final deliberation.

Second, any board actions on major personnel or policy decisions should have a clear explanation of the decision, including why such changes are needed to promote excellence and competitiveness.

Third, make objective decisions without regard to any outside political, personal or media pressure. Your decisions should be based solely on the best interests of the University. While

public input is very important and should be given due consideration, it is not the responsibility of the faculty, staff, alumni, donors other parties -- or even the Governor -- to manage the University. Members of the board are the only individuals who possess the complete information necessary to make these very important personnel decisions.

Fourth, act as a unified board when your deliberations are done. While no one expects unanimous votes on this or other major issues, the Board must speak with one, united voice once decisions are made. These past weeks of leaks to the media regarding closed sessions, and vacillating positions are unacceptable.

The actions taken by the board over the next days and months will be highly scrutinized. I have every confidence that you will make sound decisions based solely on what is in the best interests of the University.

But let me be absolutely clear: I want final action by the Board on Tuesday. If you fail to do so, I will ask for the resignation of the entire Board on Wednesday. Regardless of your decision, I expect you to make a clear, detailed and unified statement on the future leadership of the University.

We all look forward to moving forward in a positive, constructive way and to returning the focus of the University to teaching our next generation of young leaders who will keep America great.

The University is a very special place and I am confident that these times of adversity will eventually make it stronger, better managed, and better able to discuss differences. As the father of two sons at the University, I have seen first-hand the enormous talent, intellect, and promise of this great University, and know that its best days lie ahead.

With warm regards,



Robert F. McDonnell